
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Eaton School, Cleveland Park Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	3301 Lowell Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	October 4, 2018	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
H.P.A. Number:	18-607	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Informational

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is conducting a feasibility study to examine a range of approaches that could meet the increasing demands on the John Eaton Elementary School in a future modernization project. The feasibility study includes six preliminary concepts, but DCPS has not formally endorsed any of the options at this point. Given the public interest in the project and prior to DCPS soliciting a project architect, HPO has recommended that an informational presentation be made to the HPRB. While no formal action or vote is necessary, the informational presentation is intended to provide the Board an opportunity to consider the range of alternatives evaluated thus far, hear the comments and concerns of the community, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current alternatives, and potentially identify additional approaches that should be evaluated.

Eaton School

John Eaton Elementary School was constructed in three primary phases between 1910 and 1931. The earliest and most ornate building was designed by Washington architect Appleton P. Clark in 1910, and constructed on the western side of the site in 1911. A DC Public Schools Survey Report describes the building as "...unusual for its use of gargoyles... and multicolored brick to articulate the façade." Other distinctive features include a beautifully ornate iron roof ventilator, projecting entrance bays, decorative cast stone elements and entrance canopies that are no longer extant. In 1922, Washington architect Arthur B. Heaton prepared plans for a similarly-sized addition that took many of its design cues from the original school. This addition was constructed on the eastern side of the site in 1923 and, like the original, features walls composed of red brick with window surrounds, belt courses and a frieze made of yellow brick. This unique multicolored brick feature was also incorporated into the last historically significant addition constructed in the middle of the site, a multi-purpose (i.e. gymnasium/auditorium) erected in 1931. Although the design of the 1930s addition is similar to others of its kind, it is believed to be the only multi-purpose building that features red and yellow brick. All three building campaigns to construct and expand the school fall within the Cleveland Park Historic District's 1880-1941 Period of Significance.

Prior to 1980, the three historic parts of the building were joined together via a narrow brick connector that featured a cast stone panel with the words "John Eaton Public School No. 160" along its crest. In 1981, a Brutalist-styled concrete administrative addition replaced the original connector, severely interrupting the visual and physical relationship among the earlier buildings. The cast stone panel was preserved and relocated into a retaining wall which now serves as school signage. The 1981 addition falls outside of the historic district's period of significance.

Evaluation

The six preliminary concepts outlined in the feasibility study present a variety of approaches. Some involve rehabilitation of the existing buildings with no new construction (Scheme A), while others

propose modification of the multi-purpose building (Scheme B), and some suggest new construction on one or both sides of the site (Schemes C, C.1, D, and E). The following preservation considerations should be taken into account when evaluating the various approaches:

- All three campaigns of the school's construction between 1910-1931 are significant and should be preserved, if possible. Evaluation of alternatives that prevent or limit demolition should be fully considered. Demolition of any of the three historic components of the school, in whole or significant part, would require review by the Mayor's Agent.
- The 1931 multi-purpose wing is unusual for a rear addition of its type on a DC public school because of the contextual nature of its design, the quality of its decorative brickwork and its ornamental cupola that serves as a focal point for the building when viewed from the north, west and east.
- The symmetrical development pattern in which the school has expanded over time, resulting in a balance of component parts that break down the scale of the building to relate it to its residential context, is a character-defining feature of the school that should be respected and inform future expansion plans.
- The 1981 addition is not historically significant, is not compatible with the historic school, and should be removed.
- The original connector between the 1911 and 1923 wings should serve as inspiration for the new entry and reincorporating the original cast stone panel featuring the school name into the new entry should be considered. New construction in this location should be of a high architectural quality and subordinate in height and setback to the wings.
- The effects of new construction on the character of the historic district must be considered as well as the effects on the school. The surrounding historic neighborhood consists of finely-scaled, freestanding, two- to two-and-one-half houses that are set within a continuous early-20th century suburban landscape. While a school is obviously a very different building type than detached houses, new construction on the school grounds should be respectful of the setbacks, scale, materials, and architectural qualities of the surrounding context and the broader Cleveland Park Historic District.
- Portions of the site may contain archaeological resources and investigations may be required depending upon the alternative that is selected.

While not preservation or design related, there are other important considerations that must also be taken into account when evaluating the various approaches:

- The Education Specifications identified by DCPS must be met.
- Open play space is critically important for the students and is also important to the character of the site by providing views to, and a setting for the historic school.
- The impacts of parking on the neighborhood should be considered.
- Bioretention, stormwater management and related issues must be addressed.

The historic preservation review process will rely upon input from DCPS and other agencies to determine the degree to which the alternatives meet the non-preservation related considerations, but for purposes of the feasibility study, the following observations can provide a general basis for comparing how each preliminary concept responds to the preservation goals. These observations are not the result of an exhaustive analysis and do not necessarily represent a complete list of conclusions that may be drawn, but they do identify many of the most apparent preservation-related “pros and cons” of each approach.

Scheme A – This scheme meets or exceeds many preservation considerations but fails to restore the visual and physical relationship between the earliest school buildings by retaining the 1981 addition. This approach probably does not warrant further consideration because it most likely does not meet the minimum DCPS program requirements.

Scheme B – This scheme minimizes impacts on the historic district but effectively demolishes the 1931 multi-purpose wing by engulfing it in new construction. However, it also provides a good deal of open space and raises questions about how the new construction might be revised to retain more of the character of the historic building. Would it be possible to locate more of the new construction below or to the sides of the multi-purpose wing and retain the historic building’s essential character?

Schemes C and C.1 – These similar schemes successfully retain all three historic buildings but break the school’s symmetrical development pattern, block views to the 1931 addition from one side, and introduce a disproportionately large addition into the historic district. They also significantly limit open space. Would it be possible to modify massing, refine setbacks, introduce green walls or make other architectural modifications that visually reduce the perceived mass?

Scheme D – This scheme successfully retains all three historic wings of the building, introduces new additions that have relatively minimal effects on the historic district and provides a great deal of outdoor space but it also breaks the school’s symmetrical development pattern, blocks views to the 1911 and 1931 buildings and requires a direct connection to the ornate entry bay of the original school. Could this approach be improved by depressing the new addition further below grade, dividing it vertically or horizontally and locating the other half behind the 1923 addition in keeping with the past symmetrical development, or through other means?

Scheme E – This scheme, similar to Scheme D, successfully retains all three historic wings of the building but introduces a larger new addition that has a greater effect on the historic district. It also provides less outdoor space, breaks the school’s symmetrical development pattern, blocks views to the 1911 and 1931 buildings to a greater degree and requires a connection to the ornate entry bay of the original school. Revisions similar to those suggested for Scheme D might be employed to improve the compatibility of this approach but challenges may outweigh the potential for success.

Common Observations: All new construction schemes currently propose the same massing and footprint for the new entry which extends further forward than the historical connector. This approach should be carefully studied to ensure that as much of the visual relationship between the two earliest buildings is restored as possible. Early and regular coordination with the Commission of Fine Arts on all aspects of the project is encouraged to help ensure consensus among review agencies.

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